UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra (UTSO)

Uri Mayer, *conductor*
Angela Ng, *piano*, Winner of the 2025 UTSO Concerto Competition

Thursday, December 4th, 2025 at 7:30pm | Tribute Communities Recital Hall, 83 York Boulevard

The UTSO concerts are made possible in part by a generous gift from Neville Austin.

PROGRAM

In Bohemia, Overture on Czech Themes

Mily Balakirev (1836–1910)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F major, op. 102

I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Allegro

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Angela Ng, *piano*
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Intermission

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, op. 36

I. Andante sostenuto
II. Andantino in modo di canzona
III. Scherzo. Pizzicato ostinato. Allegro
IV. Finale. Allegro con fuoco

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

As part of the Faculty's commitment to improving Indigenous inclusion, we call upon all members of our community to start/continue their personal journeys towards understanding and acknowledging Indigenous peoples' histories, truths and cultures.
Visit indigenous.utoronto.ca to learn more.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA (UTSO)

Uri Mayer, *conductor*

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Elianna Van Raatle, *concertmaster*
Viviana Chan
Blake Collins
Melie Inageda
Sharon Jin
Aura Kwon
Jamie Lee
Cameron Liao
Vincent Poon
Kasey Scoboria
William Sale
David Xu
Robert Yang
Qiqi Zhang

Violin II
Kai Schulz Rousseau, *principal*
Juliette Bhogal
Katherine Chen
Zelda Faulkes
Solana Frebold
Lauren Da-Hyun Lee
Timothy Jin Seo Li
Sophie Reimer-Epp
Sam Talebi
Boyao (Bryan) Wang
Deborah Alexandra White
Mizuki Yaesawa
Nga Yu (Pely) Yau

Viola
Meika Sonntag, *principal*
Dai Hao (Tony) Chen
Isla Ertl
Gabriella Caitlyn Liu
Viola Szakony
David Xu

Cello
Maren Helyar, *principal*
Antonia Cambre
Yuheng (Hasselhoff) Chen
Daniel Ulloa Garcia
Hoiyan Law
Sera Lee
Tzu-Chieh (Jill) Liang
Mariana Pit Torres Siebiger
Ryan Wu
Xinyu (Cindy) Zhang

Double Bass
Jordan Sirvin, *principal*
Kelsea Hopkins
Sidney Hufton
Jude Littlefield Buschlen
Marcus Wong

Flute/Piccolo
Ethan Allaire
Rowan Forh
Lauren Rodesh
Rachel Roe-Wu

Oboe/English Horn
Clara Aristanto
Jasmine Noone
Nicholas Pomares

Clarinet
Cheng Cheng
Marco Ding
Farimah Khorrami
Andrzej Jozef Osko

Bassoon
Kelton Hopper
Jaclyn Yee

Horn
Charlotte Alexander
Anik Caissie
Ethan Chialtas
Finn Parks
Evan Turner

Trumpet
Grace Locker
Daniel Rofaiel
Kevin Weijie Zhao

Trombone
Shaela Lundy
Wenxiang (Andy) Wu

Bass Trombone
Amaya Sydor

Tuba
Jack Shiels

Timpani/Percussion
Jon Bilek
Jade Hails
Wang Yu (Arthur) Lo
Bevis Ng
Cristobal Salazar
Jerry Yuan

Harp
Emmanuel Luna Wong

PROGRAM NOTES

“In Bohemia”, Overture on Czech Themes (1883-4) – M. Balakirev

Every great composer was, at some point, a student. Yet, it is often the teacher who is forgotten as the success of their student grows. My case in point: it is likely your first time seeing the name “Mily Balakirev” on an orchestral program. Unfortunately, this would not come as a surprise in the slightest.

Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) is not performed nearly as often as the works of the composers he taught and influenced — household names such as Rimsky-Korsakov and Mussorgsky — who gave us orchestral gems like Scheherazade and Pictures at an Exhibition. It is largely unknown that Balakirev was the driving force behind much of their musical development, shaping not only their technical skills, but more profoundly, a new vision of sound for an entire generation of Russian composers in the 19th century.

Germanicism dominated musical spheres in cosmopolitan Russia well into the nineteenth century, shaping both pedagogy and composition alike. This dominance only began to wane when increased state and private financial support allowed the Russian arts world to thrive by nurturing Russian talent, encouraging experimentation with folk elements, and providing composers the resources to cultivate a distinctly Russian musical voice, free from this German influence.

It was Mikhail Glinka who inspired a young Balakirev to champion this aesthetic vision by mentoring other Russian composers. From this effort emerged the “Balakirev Circle”— charmingly known as the “Mighty Handful” or the “Kuchka” (in Russian, meaning “pile”, “knot” or “batch”) — a group of five Russian composers (Balakirev, Cui, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin) dedicated to the deliberate creation of a new Russian musical nationalism, what we recognize today as the Russian Nationalist School of Composition. Balakirev’s “In Bohemia”- Overture on Czech Themes — a product of this school — offers us a chance to celebrate this teacher’s own compositional voice, independent of his role as a prolific mentor. This orchestral fantasy evokes the spirit and landscapes of Bohemia, now North-Eastern Czechia, with sublime charm, witty lyricism and joyful color.

The Russians had a very different approach to generating energy within a composition; it can be noticed in the overture you will hear this evening. For their Austrogermanic counterparts, energy gain was all about structural development: themes were carefully developed over long periods of time, harmonies progress toward goals, and tension-resolution arcs drive momentum forward. Here, generating momentum is externalized – you feel the piece building toward a climax because the composer shapes and transforms the material over time within the confines of normative structural conventions. But for the new Russian school, themes remain largely the same through the duration of a work and, actually, are rather underdeveloped (and certainly, not very dynamic) to the German-trained ear. Instead, its energy arises from the internal. Repetition of themes, abrupt juxtaposition of contrasting elements, and distinct attention to secondary parameters such as timbre and dynamics allow the music to generate energy from itself in a kind of selfcontained, cyclical, near chaotic manner that does not rely on linear harmonic or thematic development. In essence: if a Germanic composition is like a river that flows toward a larger, more awe-inspiring body (like a waterfall), a new Russian work is a whirlpool that spins and swirls in place, creating turbulence and energy that comes from its constant circular motion, not from its propulsion toward a larger body. So brilliantly, this does not reflect a lack of compositional sophistication – quite the opposite: it is an entirely novel way of generating musical momentum within the same normative framework used by the Austrogermanic school.

This underrated overture is a celebration of both Bohemia and Russia simultaneously: inspirations of the beautiful Bohemian landscapes in this new and highly sophisticated Russian musical context. The work opens with a bright, lyrical melody that evokes rustic landscapes and festive dances, albeit in anticipation of excitement to come. The opening melody moves playfully through contrasting sections full of whit and color, building rhythmic energy little by little, until the music bursts into a

snappy, rhythmic and texture-filled section that brings the spirit of Czech folk music to life. Though based on Czech material, the music is filtered through Balakirev's distinctive Russian nationalist lens, creating a work that is both vividly local in character for the Czechs, but unmistakably shaped by the novel aesthetic of the Kuchka.

Piano Concerto No. 2 Op. 102 (1957) – D. Shostakovich

Ideas for compositions are, certainly, not always borne out of grand ideologies or philosophies. Historically, it is not uncommon for a composition to have been given as a gift to a friend, used to communicate a secret message of intent to one's beloved, or as a dedication to a family member. Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), in fact, composed his Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Major, Op. 102 as a gift for his son Maxim's graduation from the Moscow Conservatory in 1957, one of the great schools of music in Russia both then and, still, now. In contrast to the often dark and intense textures of his earlier works, this concerto so clearly conveys a charming, witty, and youthful spirit to us, while still bearing Shostakovich's signature blend of irony and lyricism.

Though brief, this concerto reflects Shostakovich's mature ability to combine technical brilliance and expressive depth. Opening with an Allegro movement in F Major, this piece's witty undercurrent establishes itself firmly as nimble rhythms, sparkling textures and occasional bursts of humor capture our attention. Interestingly, a work like this is borne during a time of rare optimism in Soviet musical life, allowing Shostakovich slightly greater freedoms and lightness in his musical expressions. No less, he wrote this concerto rather quickly – in all but three weeks – and considered it a 'student piece,' modest in ambition and scope compared to his major symphonic works, where he felt free to experiment and explore.

The central Andante movement features one of Shostakovich's most heartfelt melodies. This tender and introspective meditation unfolds in long, songlike phrases over a transparent orchestral accompaniment. In its simplicity, a father's expression of profound affection toward his son is revealed, creating deep emotional resonance. A most spirited finale follows this lyrical movement, full of humorous twists and jubilant energy. Slightly tongue-in-cheek, it is sly and virtuosic as so many of Shostakovich's orchestral works are, returning to Shostakovich's characteristic traits of optimism and parody.

Though modest in scope, this concerto encapsulates a rare moment in Shostakovich's output: a space where he could speak freely about something deeply personal. Throughout his career, Shostakovich did find ways to express his innermost thoughts to a degree, but they were often veiled in irony or parody, masked beneath layers of ambiguity and wit. Here, however, it seems that that veil is lifted. This work reveals Shostakovich as a father – joyful and sophisticated, playful and sincere, honest without needing to hide – offering a glimpse of optimism and humanity at the heart of a century too often marked by fear and constraint.

The University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra warmly welcomes 2024-25 UTSO Concerto Competition Winner, the brilliant Angela Ng, to perform this timeless work for you this evening.

Symphony No. 4 (1877-1878) – P. I. Tchaikovsky

If Romantic Era music is said to wear its heart on its sleeve, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's (1840-1893) Symphony No. 4 is certainly an embodiment of that reality. Composed between 1877 and 1878, this symphony stands as one of his most personal and dramatic symphonic works. From its first explosive brass fanfare, each listener is drawn into a world of struggle, confession and resilience. Interestingly, this work mirrors emotional upheaval in Tchaikovsky's life. At this time, his marriage to Antonina Milyukova was breaking down while an intense correspondence with his patroness Nadezhda von Meck was growing, both causing personal turmoil. He described the opening fanfare as both "the embodiment of Fate" and "the seed of the whole symphony". Fate, for Tchaikovsky and his contemporaries, was a common theme but still, absolutely not a mere abstract concept — it was a visceral force to be reckoned with. Yet the symphony is ultimately defined by the emotional journey it evokes—its volatility both unsettling and unpredictable.

The first movement unfolds as a vast battle between free will and fate begins, alternating between moments of despair and defiance. It opens with its famous four-note motif — a striking and relentless gesture that sets the tone for the entire symphony. This motif recurs throughout the symphony, acting as a narrative anchor that reminds us of this ongoing battle between fate and the self. The first movement is full of contrasting episodes in the typical Tchaikovskian fashion, alternating between heroism and melancholy, certainly keeping the listener on their toes.

The second movement is an Andantino, providing a strikingly intimate contrast to the first movement – a moment of rest characteristic of Tchaikovsky's brilliant lyric writing. The oboe introduces a hauntingly tender melody that weaves around and through a delicate string accompaniment. Often described as reflective or even elegiac, this movement can be seen as a personal meditation; one imagines, still mirroring the emotional state of this composer during a time of personal struggle. Both rich yet understated, this movement is a moment of respite that allows the listener to dwell on the beauty, fragility and quiet pathos of the human experience.

Our moment of tender introspection ends abruptly as the Scherzo, the Third Movement, bursts through with its restless energy and ironic playfulness. Like something out of a 20th century work by Benjamin Britten, the third movement is written entirely pizzicato in the string section, giving it a kind of nervous and whimsical atmosphere. Is Tchaikovsky demonstrating that even amidst life's anxieties and struggles, humour and levity may co-exist? While we cannot know exactly, we can say that the scherzo's lightness certainly contrasts with the overall seriousness of the symphony thus far, perhaps preparing the listener for a final confrontation with fate in the final movement.

In its final 30 seconds, the third movement is worked up into a flurry of repeated gestures, then a sudden moment of calm. The finale, an Allegro con fuoco, immediately explodes with folk-inspired vitality and rhythmic drive; it seems that Tchaikovsky is taking fate into his own hands. Here, Tchaikovsky blends his mastery of melody, orchestral color, and rhythmic propulsion to create a sense of triumph earned through resilience, rather than ease. Yet just as all darkness seems dispelled, the fate motif from the first movement returns – an unsettling reminder that struggle and vulnerability – destiny and free will – have not gone anywhere. The same dramatic juxtaposition that defined the first movement has reemerged, still encapsulating the Romantic fascination with tensions between personal agency and external force.

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 is both remarkable, and equally unsettling. This is not only because of its emotional intensity, but also for its innovative use of thematic unity and psychological nuance. Its recurring encounters with fate provide cohesion, while contrast between movements creates an unsettling journey through despair, reflection, humor and resilience. Yet again, a composer has elevated their work beyond autobiography, pouring their heart into a timeless exploration of fate, freedom and humanity within the symphonic structure. A cornerstone of the orchestral repertoire, Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 is one of many great reflections of Romanticism at its finest: full to the brim with drama, emotional candor and enduring expressive power.

All Program Notes by: Emma C. Tanovich (DMA Orchestral Conducting, '28)

BIOGRAPHIES

Uri Mayer

Uri Mayer, Professor and Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of Toronto since 2014, has taught on the faculties of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Rice University Shepherd School of Music in Houston, McGill University in Montreal and at the Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory of Music (GGS).

Renowned for his strong command of broad symphonic, operatic, and ballet repertoire, Mayer has guest conducted many of the leading orchestras around the world including the Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver symphonies in Canada, the Houston and Utah symphonies in the U.S.A., London Mozart Players and the English Symphony Orchestra, NDR Philharmonie in Hannover, Slovak Philharmonic, Budapest, Belgrade and Sophia Philharmonics, Israel Philharmonic, NHK Orchestra and Osaka Symphony in Japan and National Symphony of Taiwan. He served as the Principal Conductor of the Kansai Philharmonic Orchestra in Osaka, Japan and the Artistic Director of the Israel Sinfonietta. In Canada, Mayer was Music Director of the Edmonton Symphony and Orchestra London. He has led numerous opera productions in Canada, the U.S.A., the Netherlands, Hungary, and Israel including *The Barber of Seville*, *Così fan tutte*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Salome* and *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

Some of the distinguished soloists who have collaborated with him include Elly Ameling, Kathleen Battle, Maureen Forrester, Frederica von Stade, Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Peter Oundjian, Mstislav Rostropovich, Yo-Yo Ma, Claudio Arrau, Emanuel Ax and Sir András Schiff. Mayer has recorded for the Arabesque, CBC, Denon Japan, Hungaroton and Koch labels. Under his direction the Edmonton Symphony became one of Canada's most frequently heard orchestras on radio. They were awarded the Grand Prix du Disque-Canada for the recording *Orchestral Suites of the British Isles* and nominated for a Juno Award for *Great Verdi Arias* with Louis Quilico. In 2009, the University of Western Ontario conferred on Mayer a Doctor of Music Honoris causa in recognition of his contribution to the musical life in Canada.

Angela Suet Kee Ng

Recognized as an emerging young artist, Angela Suet Kee Ng was a Grand Prize winner in the CANIMEX Canadian Music Competition (2017), making her orchestral debut with the Orchestre de la Francophonie. She also performed in Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall as part of the first prize winner ceremony for the American Protégé International Music Talent Competition (2017), and performed with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra in their Chinese New Year Celebration (2022). Angela notably won 7 trophies, including the Aikins Memorial Trophy, in the Winnipeg Music Festival's 2021 season. She recently won numerous first-place trophies at the CCC Toronto International Music Festival, as well as first place in the Ontario Music Festival Association Concerto Class (2025).

Angela is in her fourth year of studies at the University of Toronto with Lydia Wong as the recipient of the four-year Alice and Armen Matheson Entrance Scholarship, a full tuition scholarship awarded to the top undergraduate applicant in piano performance. She is grateful for her past teachers Ludwig Lee, Jane Petroni, David Moroz and Jamie Parker. As an artist, Angela believes that music is not only a gift to share, but a universal vessel of communication and understanding. She strives to express authentic human emotions through her music, which is why her goal is to be a piano professor to both teach and perform, connecting with a variety of individuals.

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